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AGAINST A SEA OF TROUBLES

by Felix Morley

Premier Paul Ramadier of France, not heretofore generally regarded as a man of outstanding personality or talents, has emerged in the last few days as a leader of international significance. One may note that his policy is dexterous without concealing the fact that it is also desperate.

The most obvious accomplishment of the Socialist Premier is the removal of the Communist representatives in the French Cabinet. A similar purge was recently accomplished in Belgium, but the French action is much more significant, since in the larger of the two nations the Communists hold nearly one-third of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies and also exercise more influence in the labor unions than they do in Belgium.

M. Ramadier's decision to oust the Communists from their key positions in the control of policy was itself of major importance. Simultaneously, however, he has strengthened his moderate regime in two other respects. He has secured a $250,000,000 loan on favorable terms from the World Bank, the first credit to be extended by this agency. And he has made the formal award of the Medaille Militaire to Winston Churchill, last Saturday, an occasion of first-rank political significance.

The loan, on which no repayment of principal need be made during the next five years, will be used for imports which are essential if the all-important "battle of the franc" is to be won. The sum granted is only half of that requested by the French Government, but should suffice both for improvement of steel production and of transportation facilities, two basic French needs. It is certainly not pure coincidence that this loan was authorized, seven months after the French application, on the very day that Ramadier appointed three Socialists and a Popular Republican to the Cabinet positions vacated by the ousted Communists.

Presentation to Winston Churchill of the highest military honor which France can bestow was also a matter of perfect timing. The ceremony was utilized for a formidable military display in Paris, featuring the discipline and loyalty of Algerian and Moroccan units. Both Commu-

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nists and de Gaullists will know how to interpret the emphasis which the Ramadier Government placed on its ability to assemble many regiments of reliable troops as a matter of course.

Nor will the Kremlin miss the political significance of the citation of the British Conservative leader. The French Government which has just ousted its Communist spokesmen took pains to note simultaneously that France is "honored to have fought beside" Winston Churchill -- the man who once said that "Communism rots the soul of a nation."

II

What makes Premier Ramadier's current actions so important, however, is not only their dynamic nature but even more the somber background against which they stand out in bold relief.

During a visit to Paris, and then on across France to Switzerland and back during March and April, I found profound uncertainty as to the future predominant in the minds of all Frenchmen with whom I talked, whether Conservative or Communist, journalist or gendarme. This lack of assurance was pronounced in respect to both political and economic problems. Of course these have a mutual reaction, and are inseparable.

This analysis gives prior rank to the political issue primarily because it happened to boil up to fever heat while I was in Paris. The proximate cause was a series of mystifying speeches by General de Gaulle, who emerged from some months of contemplative retirement to make vitriolic attacks on the new French Constitution and to call for a "rassemblement" of the French people to purify and unify their national life.

The first question, of many directed at de Gaulle and unanswered by him, is precisely what he means by rassemblement. English-speaking journalists agreed to translate it as a "rally"; but in French the word has distinctly revolutionary overtones. In the vocabulary of the gendarmerie, disperser un rassemblement is to disperse a mob. What General de Gaulle is organizing, however, is no mob. It is a permanent mobilization, with registered adherents in all parts of the country.

Because of similarity to the way in which Hitler built National Socialism, the de Gaullist movement has naturally given rise to feverish speculation. For instance, I was startled to be asked by Andre Siegfried, an acute and objective observer of French politics, whether any private American funds are going to the support of the "rally."

The French Communists have made vague accusations to this effect, attempting to give them plausibility by tying in the official American program of financial assistance to Greece and Turkey. But the Communist Party, having a larger Parliamentary representation than any

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other in France, has not needed to foster rumors in order to make political capital out of de Gaulle's activities.

Because the General has condemned the Constitution of the Fourth Republic the Communists have been placed in a position where they can pose as its defenders, assuming a leadership which for a time threatened to force the Socialists to play second fiddle and to split the Popular Republican Party (MRP) wide open. This trend, if it had not been checked, would soon have disintegrated Premier Ramadier's support. His current energetic reaction may well have staved off political crisis.

III

No amount of political courage, however, will of itself strengthen the French economic position, which is not improving to the extent that should be expected two years after the close of hostilities in Europe. The effort to bring prices down has at best done no more than halt the upward spiral and there is growing irritation over the seeming inability of the rationing system to distribute food equitably.

Unlike the situation in England, the black market flourishes in France, where the rate of exchange offered openly for dollars is about 50 per cent above the legal figure. In consequence, the recovery problem is wholly different in the two countries. The British economy is being slowly strangled by an efficient Socialism. The French economy is in some respects more healthy and dynamic, but the wage earners can point to more governmental laxness, and have many more grievances of class discrimination.

For this reason the Communists are not so unhappy to be relieved from any governmental responsibility during the weeks immediately ahead. Undoubtedly, their political setback will coincide with a campaign to strengthen the Communist organization among both agricultural and industrial workers. It is not generally realized that Communist strength in France is no longer confined to the cities. La Terre, generally regarded as the best agricultural paper in France, is now Communist-controlled.

In the CGT, the well unified federation of French trade unions, Communist influence is firmly predominant and likely to become more so. Even General de Gaulle can scarcely be so ill-advised as not to realize that any move to seize power on his part would be immediately countered by a general strike which would stop every wheel in France. On the other hand, any overt act by the Communists would as certainly swing a large measure of popular support behind the former leader of the Free French.

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It is this uneasy balance of power, between the potential extremists of Right and Left, which has given Premier Ramadier the opportunity he has been shrewd enough, and courageous enough, to grasp. His triumph, however, is likely to be of a strictly temporary nature unless the unfavorable economic picture can be improved.

In that connection the assistance provided by the first loan of the World Bank will be important, though this $250,000,000 credit is scarcely enough to break the vicious circle in which the French economy is caught. The paramount need is increased production, of everything from coal to cattle. Without increased production prices will inevitably rise further, the more quickly because the government cannot enforce the controls which irritate and impede, without eliminating the black market. The Communists make a forceful point when they tell the wage earners that the only really effective control of the Socialist Government is the one which freezes wages.

To meet this point the Premier seeks to work out with the Confederation of Labor a formula whereby payments supplementary to wages will be made in all cases of increased plant productivity. This output bonus is obviously a good idea, but not for that reason sure to be adopted.

The colonial ferment, which the Communists have certainly done nothing to avert, is another element in the tangle of French difficulties which has economic as well as political importance. As long as revolt could be confined to Indo-China and Madagascar the continuing failure to re-establish French overseas dominion was not of great import, except as a matter of prestige. Now, however, well-organized Arab opposition to French rule in North Africa has reached the stage where the ill-conceived censorship can no longer conceal the facts of rebellion. The unrest in Algeria, called the bread basket of France because of the great quantities of wheat it normally provides, is something with which no government in Paris can afford to temporize.

A serious disservice to France has been done by pretending that its recovery is more advanced, its political and economic problems less serious, than is actually the case. And there has been too much of Hamlet in the character of successive post-war Premiers. It would be hazardous to predict success for M. Ramadier's courageous stand. But few will withhold admiration for his decision "to take arms against a sea of troubles."

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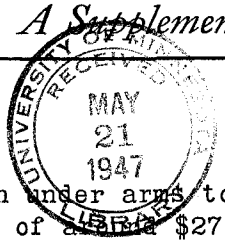

By Frank C. Hanighen May 14, 1947

About 19 million men remain under arms today, and forty nations are attempting valorously to foot an arms bill of around $27 billion a year. The world is now spending about $10 billion more annually on armaments than it was in 1938, when the hosts of Armageddon were gathering. It is estimated that there are presently more men in uniform than there were in pre-war years, when Germany and Japan were assembling their forces. These are the high lights of the depressing picture which Hanson W. Baldwin presents in the New York Times (May 12), with much supporting statistical data.

This appalling set of figures has drawn many comments. But one pertinent conclusion, which emerges inexorably from them, has not received sufficient recognition. Soviet Russia, is shown to have the largest army in the world, and the cost in rubles is enormous. But the cost as expressed in terms of a lowered standard of living, in a country even normally starved for consumer goods, is something which the tireless Mr. Baldwin does not attempt to measure. In China, where the armies -- Nationalist and Communist -- rival Russia's forces in numbers, the Chinese inflation has reached a fantastic stage. Even smaller nations try to shoulder increased military budgets, with accompanying reduction in goods and services. This tale of economic woe suggests that it is the titanic arms race -- not trade barriers, blocked currencies, labor unrest, and other consequences -- which is the real cause of the present world-wide problem of underproduction.

The United States is no exception. The Baldwin study says that "the biggest spender is the United States which . . . will spend 34 per cent of its projected 1948 budget on military items." This 34 per cent is the greatest obstacle in the way of the Congressional majority which is seeking to restore our economy to healthy operation by reducing expenditures and taxes. In short, in this country too the conflict between arms and plowshares is blocking the great potential productive forces of the nation.

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To the current American "battle for production," there is likely to be added a conflict of arguments about the expansion of productive facilities. Forecasts of a Commerce Department report (New York Times, May 11), soon to be issued, on the steel industry indicate that the industry may be urged to consider expansion of existing capacity. "Big Steel," the United States Steel Corporation, in its recent report, is cautious about continued high demand for its products. "Little Steel," in the Republic Steel Corporation report, is "bullish." The recent shutdown of auto plants because of lack of steel reinforces the criticism that there is a too conservative attitude towards capacity of the market to absorb larger tonnage. It is recalled, in this connection, that the armed services have reportedly shown some doubt (see NMG, April 2, 1947) that our present steel capacity is adequate for the new world role announced by President Truman.

Discussion of the Commerce Department report may range more widely. Such official observations would obviously have bearing on related problems of prices, wages and taxes. According to the Times, the report will indicate "that the industry cannot afford to expand without strong assurances of greater profits in the future . . . and that the cost of building new production facilities will be in excess of $200 a ton of ingot capacity. Current [income] return is about $15 a ton." Such a report could scarcely be reconciled with the Truman policy of demanding higher wages and lower prices simultaneously. And the financing necessary to build such expensive facilities may well be dependent on the outcome of the Congressional drive to lower

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taxes. It cannot be emphasized too much that Chairman Knutson's tax reduction philosophy is that the tax bill must encourage "risk capital."

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Stalin's state of health has been a favorite topic among wishful thinkers for some time and this column has abstained from the game. During the past week, however, reliable evidence on the matter has been received from unimpeachable sources. A foreigner in Moscow who is known to have talked with Stalin within the past two months describes the Soviet leader as "looking thin and not well," also "older" (than when the visitor saw him several years ago), and -- what is more -- admitting that he is "old." Perhaps because we feel older ourselves, the report convinces us that there is something to the rumors about the physical decline of the Russian dictator.

From a different source comes a report on the nature of Bevin's conversation with Stalin early in the Moscow Conference. The discussion ranged rather thoroughly over the Conference agenda. What emerged was the fact that Stalin was very inadequately informed about the progress and salient points of the negotiations. This may or may not confirm the above report on Stalin's health. But it does go some way in supporting the not uncommon suspicion that Stalin no longer exerts his former thorough-going direction of foreign affairs.

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A storm -- whether squall or real tempest remains uncertain at this date -- is blowing up over Senate ratification of the Italian treaty. While the treaty has been reported out of committee, that does not preclude possibility of serious opposition. Opponents claim 23 votes pledged against it, and hope to get the 32 necessary to kill it. What is not generally known is that Truman and Marshall have grown cool about the agreement and reportedly would not be opposed to shelving it. They are said to fear that its provisions will foster greater Communist strength, if not the installation of a Communist government. The fall of the moderate Gasperi regime strengthens this view point. Senator Vandenberg, on the other hand, who sees in the treaty his own handiwork, wants it ratified.

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The NKVD is planning a campaign of terrorism in the Western zones of Germany, according to information from reliable observers of the Central European scene. The terrorists, however, will not appear as Communists, but in the guise of Nazis. The Russian security police, which knows how to use agents provocateurs, for some time is said to have been creating an organization composed of former Nazis captured in the Eastern zone, planting them in the British and American controlled areas. The mission of the organization is reportedly to attack not only the local German officials, but also British and American military government personnel.

It was against this "Communazi" organization that the British and American authorities moved in the rather mysterious crackdown on an alleged "Nazi underground" early in March. On March 5, this column noted the ambiguous nature of the press releases on that affair. Now, it is reported, what really happened was that the Anglo-American intelligence services spotted some elements of the embryo terrorist organization and took suppressive action. Subordinate officials started to break the story, but were hushed up by the High Command, which finally, for political reasons, issued the vague statement about a "Nazi underground." Today, it is believed that the "Communazi underground," far from being suppressed, has increased in size and scope.

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The political strategy of the NKVD is, as usual, clever. The object of the alleged terrorist plan is generally to incite trouble and dissension between the population and the occupation authorities. Meanwhile the discovery that the terrorists are former Nazis would presumably divert suspicion from Russia and might inspire a revival of the demand for strict de-Nazification, a policy already responsible for widespread dissension and serious disorganization. At any rate these seem to be the NKVD calculations. How the Anglo-American officials will handle the matter remains to be seen.

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A by-election in the state of Washington will be closely watched by political observers for answers to such questions as: Is there growing opposition to the course of Congress? Has Wallace any real following? In the Democratic primaries (May 17) of the Washington district, one candidate stands on a "Wallace platform"; the other supports the Truman policies. It is conservative vs. conservative in the Republican primaries. A Republican won the seat last November. The results of the finals on June 7 will be carefully watched by Republicans who have some gnawing doubts since the recent by-election in Wisconsin. In that state's 2nd Congressional District, the Republican won by a very narrow margin -- in contrast to the heavy Republican majority in last November's election. (See NMG, April 30, 1947.)

However, Wisconsin apart, the spate of Spring elections throughout the country offers little evidence that the Democrats have translated the revived popularity of Truman into electoral gains. Republican leadership blundered in Chicago, where a Democrat won the mayoralty election, but Republicans recouped in the aldermanic contests. Although a Democrat won the Baltimore mayoralty fight, observers discount the victory because the city is traditionally Democratic in local politics. Also, when a Democrat took the mayoralty election in Lincoln, Nebraska, last week, it was pointed out that candidates do not run under party designation there. In West Virginia municipal elections, the Democrats won in Charleston, but lost in Parkersburg. Observers, looking over the score, prudently refrain from making a positive diagnosis, or offer only guesses.

One expert guess came to us the other day from a Democratic ("Jeffersonian") commentator, a supporter of Truman. He said, "If the Republicans nominated today, I think Dewey would get it. And if the Presidential election were held tomorrow, I believe Dewey would defeat Truman. But don't quote me."

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The 5 to 4 Supreme Court decision in the Harris case last week throws an interesting light on trends of opinion in that body. The majority upheld an unusually wide use of search warrants and the dissenters saw in the majority decision a blow to that part of the Bill of Rights which guarantees immunity against unlawful search and seizure. The five were Vinson, Black, Douglas, Burton and Reed; the four were Murphy, Rutledge, Frankfurter and Jackson.

Observers of the Court note the following developments: (1) The "civil liberties bloc" of Murphy and Rutledge has apparently been widened to include Frankfurter and Jackson. Frankfurter last June (Jackson was then absent in Nuremberg) joined with Murphy and Rutledge in a dissent on another "search and seizure" decision. (2) Black and Douglas, often acclaimed as "liberals" took the majority side in both decisions. Those who follow Court decisions closely ask if this represents a real shift of these New Deal "liberals" toward an authoritarian rather than a truly liberal interpretation of the Constitution.

Black and Douglas, it is recalled, joined the "authoritarian" justices in important parts of the Court decision against the United Mine Workers last March.

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Notes and Quotes

"Not even the tight grip of Communist Party zealots on Russian society has been able to throttle the Russian sense of humor," says Paul W. Ward, who covered the Moscow Conference. In the May 1 issue of his paper (the Baltimore Sun) he relates some revealing popular jokes. The first reflects the proverbial inadequacy of the Russian worker's food ration: "Stalin, at a Kremlin banquet watches his henchmen gorging themselves on caviar, fish, game and beef put before them in gargantuan array. 'My Ministers,' he remarks in regal fashion, 'are in good appetite.' 'Oh, this is nothing,' one of the more naive among them replies, 'You should see some of your workers. They can eat a whole month's ration at one sitting.'

"Another yarn in which Stalin figures reflects the miserable housing conditions in Russia, where now, as before the war, several families must be crowded into quarters scarcely big enough for one . . . In this tale a schoolteacher distributes pictures of Stalin to all her pupils and orders them to pin them up on the walls of their rooms at home. The next morning she quizzes the class to see whether her orders have been obeyed. Each little pupil answers in the affirmative until she gets to Natasha. Her reply, a stubborn negative, shocks the teacher into pressing questions that finally reduce Natasha to tears and a blurted explanation: 'We live in the center of the room.'

"Finally, all the misery of the Russian man-in-the-street is summed up in a tale built upon the fact that Lenin lies, embalmed and entombed, under glass in Red Square where hundreds queue up to gaze upon his remains each afternoon. In this story one Russian worker greets another, asking convivially: 'How're they treating you?' 'Just like Lenin,' worker No. 2 replies, 'They won't feed me, and they won't bury me.'"

* * * * *

Outside the Senate Finance Committee room, reporters waited for news and whiled away the time discussing the recently announced Pulitzer press awards. One of their colleagues, Ed Folliard of the Washington Post, had received a prize for his expose of the Fascist Columbian movement. The consensus was that Ed, a very good reporter, deserved a prize for his work in general, but not for the yarn about the Columbians. "Westbrook Pegler did the real job, showed that those crackpots did not amount to anything."

As for the Pulitzer "international" prize to Eddy Gilmore, AP man in Moscow, there was unanimous scoffing: "The job can't be done well. All a Moscow man can do is to wire copies of Soviet releases. Gilmore is no exception." Last year's award to Arnaldo Cortesi, New York Times man in Buenos Aires, was scathingly recalled: "He got the prize for underestimating Peron's strength." But it was conceded that the "editorials" prize to Bill Grimes of the Wall Street Journal was well deserved although long overdue. "Trouble with that Pulitzer Committee," summarized one, "it gives prizes to men and papers apparently on the basis that it is about time to be nice to this man or that paper, not on the basis of the year's achievements."

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"Despite a still considerable army of occupation, despite the presence of trained observers and experts of all kinds, I find that the American public has very little idea of the new thought now being born in Germany," remarks Heinrich Hauser in After the Years of the Locust, HUMAN EVENTS Pamphlet No. 17. Mr. Hauser, also author of the outspoken The German Talks Back (Holt, 1945), in this current pamphlet gives his version of what the German people are thinking about, how they are regarding their present plight and their future. "Thought is the last and the inalienable freedom which remains to the vanquished."

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